



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

SOCIAL SERVICE GRANTS COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: November 19, 2021

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: 1st Floor Conference Room; Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller, Christina Valdivia-Alcalá, Tony Emerson

City staff present: Rachelle Vega-Retana (Housing Services), Carrie Higgins (Housing Services), Bill Cochran (Chief of Staff), Bill Fiander (Planning Director), Stephen Wade (Finance Director), Adam Vaughn (Finance), Josh McArney (Finance)

1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Hiller called the meeting to order at 10:00am. Committee members introduced themselves. Staff from the City of Topeka and from United Way introduced themselves.

2) Approval of September 17, 2021 minutes

Committee member Emerson made a motion to approve the September 17th minutes. Committee member Valdivia-Alcala seconded the motion. Minutes approved 3:0.

3) 2023 Process Timeline, Priorities, and Scoring/Rating

Chairwoman Hiller noted that the plan for today would be to review the items for the 2023 process and that comments and discussion would be welcomed.

2023 Calendar/Timeline

Brett Martin, United Way, noted there had not been any major changes to the calendar from the past process timeline, other than that dates had been changed to reflect the upcoming year. Chairwoman Hiller read through the timeline out loud.

Committee member Emerson inquired about the 24-hour turnaround from having the release of the RFP proposal and the workshop, and asked if there would be a benefit to provide a few days to a week for applicants to review the material before attending the workshop? Mr. Martin stated they could allow a week for review between the release of the RFP and the workshop. Agency participants in

attendance stated they felt this change would be appropriate. There were no additional concerns or questions brought forward at this time.

2023 Priorities

Mr. Martin noted there were no changes made to this document since December 2020. City Staff also indicated that no changes had been made. Chairwoman Hiller stated that CDBG funds had ebbed and flowed over the years and inquired if they expected that figure to change? Carrie Higgins, Housing Services, noted that they were not expecting a large change in funding allocations, but that it is possible that it could go up. That amount would not be known until the second or third quarter of 2022, as allocations are sent through HUD, and then from HUD to the City of Topeka. Chairwoman Hiller inquired if Staff would inform the Committee if additional funding was available. Ms. Higgins confirmed, and stated that the amount listed on the Priorities Sheet was the conservative number and did not feel it would drop below that figure.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired about the amount that was received by Positive Connections. Their request was for \$35,000 however they received \$13,586. Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired if they usually receive higher scores and funding? Rachele Vega-Retana, Housing Services, confirmed that the score is usually higher most years. Committee member Emerson noted that although they have a funding cap of \$35,000 they are not guaranteed to receive that much. Chairwoman Hiller confirmed. She stated she had felt that perhaps both of the agencies, Positive Connections and Shawnee County Medical Society, should be removed from their positions and added to the general pool with the other applicant agencies, and sought comment. Committee member Emerson inquired about other funding sources and asked if that change would be largely impactful. Mr. Martin noted that as an impartial vendor, he was not comfortable making a recommendation, but said that the provision of services and potential revenue streams have not changed for the two organizations. They received United Way dollars as well, and through that process were able to see that both have limited revenue streams and that they are, in their applications, still unique in service delivery.

Chairwoman Hiller noted that a shift had been made in the past year to provide clarifying direction that new-untested programs would not be funded. Applicant agencies were required to demonstrate at least two-years of experience for a new program, prior to the date of application. By requiring this, it would provide some

history for the application. She inquired if there were any questions or comments on this requirement, and stated it had seemed to work pretty well. Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá stated she agreed with that requirement and did not feel a need to change it.

The next section Chairwoman Hiller sought feedback for was the CDBG recommendation. She stated it seemed that number should stay about where it is currently set. That number is then recommended to the Governing Body for approval and then to the City Manager and staff, along with what amount should then come out of the City's budget.

Chairwoman Hiller noted that the Priorities sheet also identifies that a scoring system would be used to do the final allocations. There was no additional discussion on this item. Chairwoman Hiller noted that this would also mean the funding cutoff was based on the scores and ranking as well. No additional questions or comments.

2023 Score Sheet

Mr. Martin stated there had been some changes to the application that had been discussed in previous meetings, and that he had provided the Committee with a handout of those recommendations. The list of recommendations are below.

- The suggested edits related to the score sheet, are related to coordinating the score sheet with the application. He noted the handouts provided to the Committee were pulled directly off of Ec-impact. Feedback from the Reviewers states they would like to have the score sheet as well as a reference sheet as to where, on the application, they need to be reading in order to make a determination on the score. In response to that request, United Way created an index that paired up the score sheet with the application to better assist with the review process.
- Wording changes under "Capacity" section is another location of suggested changes to language.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if the language pertaining to the index process for reviewers would be a published note or an internal one for the use of the reviewers? Mr. Martin responded that it would be public, so that in the RFP, the language would be outlined. But that for the reviewers, when they are accessing the online applications, they would have an additional ability to hover over an area and it would direct them to the corresponding information

found in other places on the application. It would be public to the applicants and then would be a tool made available for the reviewers. Mr. Martin felt this would perhaps serve as a rubric for applicants as they complete their application and may provide additional help. It would also allow for increased consistency and continuity through reviews. The reviewers have conversations throughout that reviewing process, that United Way facilitates, but this would be an additional tool as they are going along and scoring applications to find information more easily.

- Chairwoman Hiller referenced the Outcomes session and stated that the proposed changes would also help the applicants and reviewers keep the Needs Statement at the forefront of their minds and tie them together as they work on the application. Mr. Martin agreed.
- Under “Needs”:
 - “Demonstrating the Need” - United Way felt that with the targeting, that the questions and scoring was okay, correct? Mr. Martin confirmed.
- Under “Issues and Outcomes”
 - “Outcomes are clear, Outputs are clear” - no changes.
 - “Plan has been identified to measure outputs and outcomes” - no changes.
 - “Duplication of Services” - There was a comment in discussions about this. Mr. Martin noted there had been some discussion during the logic model training related to how, as programs begin to apply a logic model format to their program, they may recognize that they are duplicating services that are done by another program, however at this time United Way is comfortable with the language as it stands.
 - “Achieving outputs and outcomes on prior grants, per meaningful measures” - This had to do with checking references. Mr. Martin noted this would require an additional step for United Way in being able to verify those four applicants that had been in business for two or more years, where no history was found within United Way’s own system. United Way was able to verify those, but it took a little more time. Mr. Martin noted that the reviewers also had commented that this section was weighted quite heavily, 20%, but that they also recognized that with COVID-19, many of those programs were not able to achieve their goals.

At this time, there are no recommendations for changing at this time. Chairwoman Hiller clarified that the current process would be that if a program has been funded recently by the City that those reference checks could be done through the City. Correspondingly, it has to be clarified that a program has been around for at least two complete years so that there would be references to check, in terms of how they have managed program and funding, that can work. Mr. Martin confirmed, and offered an additional clarification that there could be a program that has been in business for two years that still has no outcomes or outputs because no one has required that information of them. In those cases, where a program has no references to check because they have not had a major grant or have not had a grantor, they would receive a score of zero, because that information could not be verified.

- Under “Capacity”
 - “Organization has the resources to produce the proposed outcomes efficiently and effectively” - Mr. Martin provided the Committee with an additional document that had suggested edits to the “Capacity” section. United Way would like to recommend that the question remain the same, but that description of the point awards be changed. Mr. Martin noted that this is the section that reviewers use to review the budgets, however that word is not currently used on the application. Suggested language is as follows:
 - “Program budget is clear, adequate and reasonable to accomplish grant outcomes. Expenditures are cost-effective and clearly linked to grant activities and organizations show strong evidence of financial stability and program sustainability”. This would receive 10 points.
 - “Limited evidence of agency effective program management cost-effective, quality service delivers, and or evaluation planning. We suggest program budget is complete but may be difficult to distinguish from organization budget. Expenditures are clearly linked to grant activities and outcomes but may not be adequate, reasonable or cost-effective. Organization shows moderate evidence of financial stability and program sustainability”. This would be worth 5 points.

- “Program budget is included in application but seems incomplete or not reflective of actual costs, activities, or outcomes. Organization shows little evidence of financial stability or program sustainability”. This would be worth zero points.

Mr. Martin noted that this language would allow reviewers to take a careful look at the budget and to ensure that the financial resources requested are linked to program activities, are distinguishable from the larger organizational budget and that the dollars proposed to be used suggest a cost-effectiveness and strategic use, and that the organization overall demonstrates financial stability and program sustainability. Chairwoman Hiller appreciated that change. She would also like to have applicants provide information regarding funding from other sources. Mr. Martin felt this would be a separate question and would be related to the diversity of revenue stream and the availability of additional revenue. The proposed change of language would provide a way for the reviewers to the budget in a way to adequately score the program on their resources to be able to produce those outcomes. He stated if there was an additional nuance added to this, related to diversity of revenue stream or availability of other revenue, he felt would muddy this section, and felt an additional question would be needed. Jessica Lehnherr, United Way, suggested making the question clearer and tied to the financial reasons as well. Chairwoman Hiller felt these changes were headed in the right direction for making progress, and inquired if it was a good question to include or to wait at this point? Mr. Martin stated that the United Way grants, there is a clear statement in the RFP that panelists have been trained to look for other revenue streams. The United Way review panel process is different from the Social Service Grants process, however it is something he was familiar with, and suggested that there could be a review of the United Way grant RFP.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá and Committee member Emerson stated a preference for the suggested language. Chairwoman Hiller agreed.

- “Formal process using client input” - no issues.
- “Organizational leadership is strong and maintains community-based representation” - Chairwoman Hiller noted this had been adjusted

slightly in a prior year, but that has been resolved. No additional discussion.

- “Past grant administration is effective” – This is a reference check. Mr. Martin noted a recommendation would be to have this section pre-populated prior to the reviewers receiving the applications, as they will have no way to score this section. United Way could put the score in that section, now that they have a year of the process under their belt. This will be the only score that is present prior to moving to the reviewers.

Committee member Emerson voiced concern with the language of this section, and suggested changing it to match the proposed language in “Capacity” more closely. He voiced having some concern for penalizing applicants for late submissions of applications, when they are only slightly late. Chairwoman Hiller noted that the same concern had been brought forward before. Committee member Emerson inquired if there was a place, currently or to be added, that would take a more holistic view of the program in totality. Mr. Martin stated that there are questions about evaluation and planning, and if a plan has been identified to measure outputs and outcomes, and felt this would be part of an evaluation piece. He stated one thing that the Committee could choose to do, would be to collapse the “past grant administration is effective” into another header that would talk about program management. That language could be along the lines of “history of effective program management, cost effective and quality service delivery, and reporting and invoicing is on time and is accurate”. Chairwoman Hiller and Committee member Emerson liked this suggestion. Mr. Martin recommended that that would be a piece that was scored internally, by City Staff or United Way, rather than having an external person to score that. A reviewer would not have access to reporting and invoicing, they would not have that last piece.

Committee member Emerson felt concern for penalizing the persons served through the program merely because an application was not turned in exactly on time. Mr. Martin stated that a similar measure is done with some of the United Way grants, and that the consequence for late submission would be for the applicant to submit monthly reports rather than the twice annual reports for a probationary period until the applicant is back in good standing. Mr. Martin noted that this is not done in cases of the first late submission, but rather for the chronically late

submissions. However, this measure can be controlled for the United Way grants because there are internal volunteers that oversee these reports. The Social Service Grant process is different, in that there is not the internal volunteer body that oversees the money and meets monthly. Mr. Martin noted that late application submissions would have repercussions throughout the process and the other applicants having to wait longer than to receive their scores, and when it becomes chronic, it really can have negative impacts throughout the whole process. Chairwoman Hiller stated that perhaps some language could be drafted to dock points for late submission, but perhaps something along the lines of 5% reduction. Mr. Martin voiced appreciation for the meticulous book-keeping that was done by the City staff from prior years. Committee member Emerson stated he would prefer to see a lower total point for this section, noting that losing a “1” or “0” would not impact the total score as greatly as a “10” or “5” or “0”. Chairwoman Hiller sought input regarding the suggestion. She stated that regardless of the number of points allotted, every point counts, and that there would still be an incentive to have program applications submitted on time. Mr. Martin suggested having United Way and City staff meet to discuss an idea that he has. He was not comfortable with discussing that idea during this meeting, but would be able to bring this item back to the next meeting and felt the idea would not create any further complications. The Committee agreed. Chairwoman Hiller directed for a recommendation to be brought back at the next meeting.

- Under “Collaboration & Partnerships”
 - “Partnerships” - no issues.

Committee member Emerson inquired about the character limitations in some of the areas, and asked if anyone had verbalized having difficulty with meeting that limitation? United Way staff members shared that they had not received any feedback from applicants about needing more space for characters. Mr. Martin shared that the limitations were added as a way to better help the reviewers who have to review the larger number of applications to get through their work.

4) Other Items

Committee member Emerson recalled some years back when a program that helped babies was not awarded funding but that a golf program was. He inquired if there was any type of measure in the process that looked at the totality of these

programs and what they offer to the community to prioritize the types of services? Mr. Martin stated that this example is a multi-year heavy lift, and the exact reason why United Way did not recommend that change this year. However, it was something that United Way has talked about. He noted the current score sheet does not currently allow a reviewer to review that. Because a program can choose their own outcomes, there is no way to adequately review the quality of an outcome. There is no way to objectively review whether the outcome is good or not, in terms of service to the community and creating a positive change. Mr. Martin stated that the reviewers do not know what the amount of money will be that a program receives when they leave. They are only responsible for reviewing the applications and providing the scores. United Way then takes the score, multiplies it by the requested amount, and then puts it into a formulated spreadsheet. Mr. Martin noted that this would be a larger question for the community, which is related to what the community is willing to coalesce around to make sure Topeka is a better place for people to live, work and flourish. He offered that it was not an impossible mission, however was not something that could be completed for this meeting. Mr. Martin noted that it may be of the Committee's interest to add to the list of priorities. He felt this would be beneficial and suggested working together to create what those would be. Chairwoman Hiller spoke to the mechanism of requesting other funding sources and not accepting new programs, as a way to help prove the need and sustainability of a program. Although this did not ensure perfection, it did seem to help with some of this concern.

Mr. Martin listed several examples of the various groups of stakeholders that this process stands in the middle of to try to figure out the best way to use dollars in order to be able to look at each group of stakeholders and state "we are investing wisely, strategically and effectively". He felt the next level would be to look at the community itself and an asset map, and run a gap analysis. This could help identify what the community priorities are, and pull together priorities that are in other areas and align them with the City's and see where they match, and then look at available dollars, the research, and then the community to hear all of those voices.

Chairwoman Hiller noted that there had been some special sessions over the past year to address some of the specific concerns; the senior centers one year and outcomes this year. She inquired if it would be timely to look for a community-wide meeting on gap analysis that would help advise the next year's committee on

taking another look at priorities. Chairwoman Hiller did not feel that would be something the Committee itself would host, but inquired if that could possibly be something that could take place by October 2022? Mr. Martin stated he has a strategic plan to complete by July 2022, but he did feel it was something to keep on the radar. He did not want to make the commitment for himself, but stated it was something that was important. Ms. Lehnherr agreed. Chairwoman Hiller inquired if the information would be beneficial for United Way to also have for their entity when reviewing the scope of their processes and services. Mr. Martin stated that some of the data provided through some of the community stakeholder meetings, which are scheduled for January 2022, could be shared. This would be data that would inform the work of United Way and the work of the City. He stated a lot of the participants would be from the larger community. Chairwoman Hiller expressed agreement and approval of the proposed idea.

Committee member Emerson exited at 11:30am.

Mr. Martin continued that the data would be pulled and analyzed through possibly April 2022, but that they could share it with the Committee. Chairwoman Hiller stated that the Committee members could change during this next year, and inquired if it might be helpful to put something on the calendar to remember to look for this community assessment from United Way. Mr. Martin felt comfortable with bringing that information to a Fall meeting.

Request from United Way for increased funding

Chairwoman Hiller noted that United Way had recently sent a letter to request a substantial increase in funding to continue providing services as the Social Service Grants third-party vendor.

Jessica Lehnherr stated that after almost two full years of working with the City on this contract, United Way realized that they had significantly underbid the cost of what it was going to take to continue to carry out this contract. Ms. Lehnherr shared a couple of things that led to this request. One, was related to United Way's grant management system. Additional costs for this system have been incurred by putting additional agencies into the program. This put United Way over their limit, requiring additional costs to increase capacity. Additionally, with having the City of Topeka fall under that contract, the portal offered an in kind donation to allow the City to remain under the contracted agency for the first year. This is no longer being offered, and there will now also be an additional cost

for extending the limit to add the City to the contracted agencies. Third, the scope of services has changed significantly since the beginning, and there is a substantial increase of employee time required for United Way. Ms. Lehnerr stated that United Way is currently at a point where they need to consider hiring an additional part-time staff member to help manage the grant management portion. This new request still may not completely cover the expenses, but would put United Way in a position to better provide the service to the City and facilitate the Social Service Grants management process.

Chairwoman Hiller requested for a report from both United Way and the City of Topeka to detail the savings made on the City's side by contracting the process out, and from United Way as to the increased expenses that facilitate the doubling of the requested amount, as well as the original contract to compare with.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala also requested a customer service component be included in the future dialogue. This would include having United Way provide in depth detail as to their customer service components. She expressed receiving positive comments from applicants as well as her own interactions regarding the level of customer service that has been provided by United Way.

5) Adjourn

Chairwoman Hiller adjourned the meeting at 11:45am.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/r160Xo7pCCI>